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 JAMES ROY MacBEAN

Sex and Politics

WILHELM REICH, WORLD REVOLUTION, AND MAKAVEJEV'S WR

Nearly fifteen years after his death, Wilhelm Reich is beginning to get some long overdue attention, particularly from the American New Left, which is discovering, as Paul Goodman put it, that "more than any other figure of our times, Reich has had things to say—and do—essential for the chief revolutionary actions of the young, whether in their politics or their hippie life style: indeed he is the connecting link between these tendencies." Makavejev's WR confronts the Reichian challenge directly.

In the past few months, there has been a sudden surge of interest in Reich, evidenced by new American editions of several pioneering works from the early part of Reich's lifelong research into human sexuality, the human psyche, and the psychosexual foundations of political behavior. (The original American editions of many of Reich's books were mostly burned by the Federal Food and Drug Administration after Reich's death in 1957). A new translation of Reich's very important *Die Massenpsychologie des Faschismus* (The Mass Psychology of Fascism) has recently been published in paperback by Noonday Press, and the same publisher has just brought out the first English translation of Reich's companion-piece to his study of fascism, *Der Einbruch der Sexualmoral* (The Invasion of Compulsory Sex-Morality). In addition, the October 1971 issue of *Liberation* is devoted entirely to Reich and includes the first English translation of Reich's 1934 essay "What Is Class-Consciousness?"—an essay Reich wrote in response to certain criticisms from the left of his study of fascism.

Another related manifestation of a burgeoning Reich renaissance is the Cambridge, Massachusetts-based publication *The Radical Therapist*, which serves as a mobilizing broadsheet

for a group of young psychologists and psychological social workers who are committed to the notion that "therapy is change . . . not adjustment." Included in their December 1971 issue (which pictures Reich on the cover) is an article devoted to Reich's correlation of sexual and political repression, and a translation of the concluding chapter from Reich's *The Sexual Struggle of Youth*.

In addition—and this is what mainly concerns us here—a number of widely discussed feature films have been released in the last year or so which, with widely varying degrees of insight and artfulness, have directed the filmgoer's attention to issues of sex and politics which Wilhelm Reich was one of the first to explore. Of these films—among which the most prominent are Visconti's *The Damned*, Petri's *Investigation of A Citizen Above Suspicion*, Z by Costas-Gavras, and Bertolucci's *The Conformist*—far and away the most original and most probing film, in my opinion, is Yugoslav film-maker Dusan Makavejev's *WR: The Mysteries of the Organism*. And not incidentally, I would argue, of all the films just mentioned Makavejev's is the only one explicitly inspired by the film-maker's desire to come to grips with the life and work of Wilhelm Reich.

REICH, FREUD AND MARX

However, before undertaking an analysis of this complex film, I think it will be useful to summarize briefly the main points of Wilhelm Reich's pioneering work in the field of sex and politics. As a young protégé of Freud in the 1920's and early 1930's, Reich directed his attention to the overwhelming importance of infantile and adolescent sexuality in the development of personality. What seems to have been the catalyst for Reich's examination of the relations between sex and politics was the recognition that parental suppression of naturally developing sexuality in their children has the effect of anchoring, in the character-structure of the individual, the authoritarian and repressive principle on which class society is based. In other words, Reich saw that the patriarchal family's authoritarian structure and its taboos on childhood sexuality were tremendously effective *ideological* weapons that served to perpetuate and reinforce, on the *unconscious* level, the authoritarian political structures of class society.

Unlike Freud, however, who believed that the Oedipal conflict—and therefore sexual repression—were biologically rooted, Reich argued that sexual repression was unknown in matriarchal societies and therefore could not be biologically rooted, but was rather the historical product of the rise of patriarchal, authoritarian class society. For Reich, in other words, *suppression* of sexuality by society preceded and produced the individual's internalized *repression* of sexuality. In answer to the troublesome question of *why* society suppressed sexuality (Freud's answer was "for the sake of culture"), Reich took the boldly materialist position that it was for the sake of class interest: he traced sexual suppression to the interests of the ruling class in protecting its inheritance lines and property; he pointed out that, historically, chastity was first imposed upon members of the ruling class alone, particularly the patrician women. Sexual repression then becomes the rule in all classes of society simply because, as Marx pointed out, "the dominant ideology in

any society is always the ideology of the dominant class." And, of course, the exploited classes are by no means immune to envying the ruling class and either consciously emulating "their betters" or unconsciously internalizing the ruling class values.

It was this "mass-psychological" vulnerability of the exploited classes that intrigued Reich as he began to study the burgeoning fascist movement in Germany in the early thirties. In his brilliantly prophetic *The Mass-Psychology of Fascism*—originally written in 1933, revised and enlarged in 1935 and again in 1945—Reich analyzed the powerful emotional content of fascism, pointing out that the German masses were attracted to the Nazi movement not so much by its political platform (which was purposely vague) as by the emotional appeal of mystical notions of "blood," "racial purity," "fatherland," "Master Race," etc. Through close readings of innumerable Nazi pamphlets and texts, as well as of the Nazi propaganda distributed through the German churches and religious organizations, Reich brought to light the underlying sexual content of these mystical notions; and he argued that religious mysticism—indeed all mysticism—was a symptom of unfulfilled, repressed, or distorted sexuality. The "mystical longing," he maintained, was really an "unconscious orgasmic longing."

Because mysticism was such an important element of fascism, Reich argued that combatting fascism on the strictly rational level of political analysis would be futile, and that since, in his view, both mysticism and authoritarianism could be traced to repressed sexuality, the way to combat fascism was to combat sexual repression. As a therapist, Reich's way of combatting sexual repression, however, was very different, theoretically and practically, from Freud's "depth psychology" approach, for Reich concentrated on the *physiological* manifestations of repression—on the rigid, tense, unyielding muscular "armor" which the individual uses to shield his emotional vulnerability. And instead of using therapy to help sublimate libidinal energy away from direct sexual expression into what Freud considered more

socially constructive channels, Reich boldly rejected the value of sublimation, which he saw as still another way in which the ruling class inculcated in the working masses "civic virtues" which were against their individual and class interests. He proclaimed that only free and unmitigated satisfaction of mature genital sexuality could be genuinely healthful and liberating for the individual. And only by liberating individual sexuality, Reich argued, could the authoritarian behavior structures of class society be eliminated. Toward this end, Reich, who at this period in his career conceived of his "sex-economy" approach as filling a long-ignored gap *within* Marxism, founded a Communist youth group known as *Sexpol* and organized informal dances and open forums for Communist youth where problems of sex rather than politics were the topic of discussion and where the avowed goals were to encourage and assist young people to attain a full and healthy sexual expression.

As one might expect, such a heretical approach got Reich in trouble with the "vulgar Marxists" who controlled the Communist Party; but it also got him in trouble with Freud and the politically conservative psychoanalysts—with the result that by 1933 Reich was excluded from both the German Psychoanalytic Society and the German Communist Party. And by 1934 he went into hasty exile from Hitler's rapidly burgeoning fascist state.

Reich settled briefly in Norway, where he developed his body-oriented therapy, then came to the US in 1939. Extremely bitter and resentful over the German Communist Party's refusal to heed his warnings regarding Hitler's mass appeal, and particularly rankled by the Party's hostility towards his attempts to redirect the energies of the Marxist movement to the neglected "cultural front," Reich gradually but strikingly changed his mind about Marxism, eventually railing against the Communists—whom he called "red fascists"—and heralding the average bourgeois American as the world's greatest hope for genuine liberation. Thumbing his nose at all politics, Reich devoted his later years in America to esoteric re-

search on something he called "Cosmic Orgone Energy," to which he attributed marvelous powers, including fuller orgasms and the cure of cancer.

SEX AND POLITICS IN SOME RECENT FILMS

Turning now to look at the way the relations between sex and politics are examined in some recent films, it seems to me that with this brief introduction to Reich's thought fresh in our mind we will be better equipped to appreciate the complexity of Makavejev's *WR: The Mysteries of the Organism* and to understand more clearly just how simplistic is the superficial "Reichianism" heralded in films like *The Damned*, *Investigation of A Citizen Above Suspicion*, *Z*, and *The Conformist*. Let us deal with this latter issue first.

The claim has been made—somewhat misleadingly, I think, by Joan Mellen (see her "Fascism in the Contemporary Film," *FQ*, Summer 1971)—that the portrait of the fascist mentality that emerges from these films corresponds to Wilhelm Reich's theory of the psychosexual foundations of political behavior. However, more than merely establishing certain similarities in approach, Mellen encourages us to take the picture of fascism presented in these films as Reich's picture of fascism, and she deals with each detail of character portrayal in each of these films as if they were individual instances conceived by the film-makers to exemplify Reich's general theory.

Attempting to defend these films against the charge that their relating homosexuality to fascism is simplistic, Mellen invokes Reich—carefully adding, however, that "the implication is not that homosexuals all display such a pattern. Too many homosexuals are artists, rebels, and gentle people for that." Here I think Mellen misses an important point: the implication which needs guarding against is not the obvious oversimplification that all homosexuals are fascists, but rather the more insidious oversimplification that all fascists are homosexuals or have latent homosexual tendencies.

Moreover, the *singling out* of homosexuality as *the* fascist character-structure (a point em-

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phasized by each of these films) does not at all correspond to Reich's views, which were that the roots of fascism are in the "normal" family, particularly in parental suppression of the naturally developing sexuality of the child. It is this "normal" inhibition of sexuality which, according to Reich, "makes the child apprehensive, shy, obedient, afraid of authority, 'good' and 'adjusted' in the authoritarian sense; it paralyzes the rebellious forces because any rebellion is laden with anxiety. . . . At first the child has to adjust to the authoritarian miniature-state, the family; this makes it capable of later subordination to the general authoritarian system."

In short, there is a vast difference between Reich's position and that reflected in *The Damned*, *Investigation of A Citizen Above Suspicion*, *The Conformist*, and *Z*: while Reich offers a process-oriented approach that sees both homosexuality and fascism as *effects* of sexual repression, these films either invite a terribly simplistic notion of cause and effect ("They were fascists because they were homosexuals") or they simply equate the two, omitting any consideration of their underlying causes. In addition—and this is especially deplorable—these films all too often make the correlation between homosexuality and fascism in a snickering, elbow-nudging way that merely invites the spectator to add a self-righteous condemnation of the fascists' sexual behavior to a self-righteous condemnation of their political behavior. Far from inviting us to consider—as Reich did—the ways in which our "normal" sexual mores might contribute to the development of fascism, these films offer us a scapegoat—the homosexual—which absolves us of responsibility for fascism and allows us to gloat in smug complacency over the evil decadence of these fascist "perverts."

WR: THE MYSTERIES OF THE ORGANISM

Fortunately, however, a film has come along which confronts Reich's ideas directly and, unlike the work of Visconti, Petri, or Bertolucci, succeeds admirably in suggesting the complexity of Reich's notions on the psycho-



Reich being hauled off to jail.

sexual foundations of political behavior. Makavejev describes his film as "in part, a personal response to the life and work of Wilhelm Reich."

WR—the initials, by the way, stand not only for "Wilhelm Reich" but also for "World Revolution"—actually seems to start out as a free-wheeling documentary on Reich; then not quite a quarter of the way into the film it takes a sudden lurch into fiction with the introduction of a parallel plot set in contemporary Yugoslavia (Makavejev's homeland); and from then on the film jumps back and forth from America (Reich's adopted home) to Yugoslavia, from more or less "documentary" material to more or less "fictional" material, and from sex to politics as well as from politics to sex.

Makavejev edits all this diverse material with a great deal of virtuosity and brio; he is an immensely talented film-maker whose experiments with *montage* and *collage* are among the most stimulating and original to come along in recent years. (For a penetrating analysis of Makavejev's earlier films—*Man Is Not a Bird*, *Love Affair: The Case of the Missing Switchboard Operator*, and *Innocence Unprotected*—see Robin Wood's essay on Makavejev in *Second Wave*, published in America by Praeger.)

While sharing certain characteristics in common with Godard's experiments with montage and collage, Makavejev's films have a greater emotional density than Godard's most recent

films (although not more than, say, *Vivre sa Vie*, *Une Femme Mariée*, and *Masculin-Féminin*) and Makavejev's work probably shares more affinities with the early Surrealist experiments of Buñuel (*Un Chien Andalou*, *L'Âge d'Or*, and *Las Hurdes*) than with anything else. And although Makavejev acknowledges the fundamental importance of Eisenstein's theoretical elaboration of montage, his own use of montage differs radically from Eisenstein's: whereas the author of *Potemkin* used montage primarily to reinforce an idea or an emotion, Makavejev uses it to build a highly complex network of cross-references, associations, and above all, of contradictions—with the result that one montage-cell does not reinforce another but rather calls it into question.

In *WR: The Mysteries of the Organism*, however, the complexity of the collage construction is almost undermined and neutralized by the insistent—and, to some, irritating—tone of light-hearted humor that sometimes smacks of the crowd-pleasing ploy aimed at young audiences who couldn't help but respond favorably to the film's bouncy appeal for sexual freedom. While I personally do not find this to be a major problem, I am aware that there is a danger that the film's flippant tone will make Makavejev's treatment of sex and politics seem deceptively facile and frivolous.*

This is a particularly strong danger in a film dealing with Wilhelm Reich, for even many of Reich's admirers will admit that there is a great difference between Reich's early illuminating work in Europe and his later, seemingly facile and far-fetched work in America. Opting for a tone of irreverence and *insouciance* throughout his film, Makavejev seems to have focused primarily, if not exclusively, on later Reich—and in doing this he has perhaps compounded the weaknesses and contradictions embodied in Reich himself.

*In San Francisco, the exhibitors advertised *WR* in the sex-house section and it closed in a week. In Boston, newspapers refused to run ads for the film. Its "real" run, on university campuses, has not yet begun.

In any case, where the man himself is concerned, the film tells us very little, for the documentary material on Reich is, by necessity I am sure, rather thin. Even scouring archives in Germany and America, Makavejev was able to come up with very little documentation on film of the young Reich's activities with the German *Sexpol* organization he helped found in the early 1930's; nor, for that matter, could he find much film footage of Reich's activities during his later years of exile in America. So, aside from a snapshot glimpse or two of Reich himself, what we see in *WR* is footage shot by Makavejev's small 16mm crew during their 1968 visit to the little town in Maine where Reich had lived and worked in his later years.

There are brief, amusing interviews with local people who knew Reich—including one with the pokerfaced deputy-sheriff who doubles as town barber stepping out of his barber shop in his police uniform to tell us that, yes, he cut Dr. Reich's hair many times, and that "Dr. Reich was a little eccentric; he didn't wear his hair like normal people"—pointing, as he says this, to his own "butch" crewcut. (This fortuitous little anecdote has very rich associations and connotations, evoking as it does the politically as well as sexually repressive notions of "normality" that dominate society—and which Reich devoted his life to combatting.)

Then, too, there are brief interviews with Reich's widow (who accuses the socialist countries of stifling and suppressing the "creative individual") and with Reich's son, who recalls the time his father grabbed a gun and went to confront a bunch of Maine citizens who had marched up to Reich's research center shouting "Down with the Commies, down with the Orggies"—the latter being their term for Reich and his Orgone Research colleagues. A tape recording of Reich's own voice then recounts this event, with Reich explaining that he simply told the angry mob he was no more a communist than they were; that he, too—"like everybody else"—had just voted for Eisenhower, and that, in fact, if they wanted to fight the Commies, he was glad, adding

"I've been fighting the Commies longer than you have."

Finally, there is a long tracking shot of the forbidding outer walls of Lewisburg Penitentiary in Pennsylvania where Reich died in 1957 while serving a two-year sentence for contempt of court arising out of his refusal to appear to answer charges alleging that he violated interstate commerce laws in selling his Orgone Accumulator Boxes, which the US Government argued "could have deleterious effects on one's health." Prison authorities at Lewisburg, by the way, refused Makavejev's request to do any filming inside the prison.

In addition to the material on Reich himself, there is some brief footage devoted to Reich's disciples and their ongoing practice of Reichian therapy. This footage is of two basic types: there are interview-statements by several Reichian therapists who explain one or another aspect of their practice of therapy, and there is some brief footage of therapy in process. In the first category, Dr. Alexander Lowen (author of *Love and Orgasm*) does a slightly hammy demonstration of the way a person's inner tensions are expressed in "body language"—what Reich called "character armor." Another protégé of Reich's gives us a humorous explanation and demonstration of how the Orgone Accumulator Box supposedly works. In general, the Reichian therapists come off as rather nice, gregarious people, but there is just enough of a touch of glibness about them to evoke the kind of skepticism which we muster when we suspect we're somehow being taken.

Footage of actual therapy in progress, however, reveals a more serious—although not necessarily more reassuring—aspect of the Reichians' approach to psychological problems. When we see patients being encouraged to scream and sob and shake, we may recognize the therapeutic potential of their giving physical vent to their emotional tensions, but the actual experience of therapy itself seems so traumatic we may wonder if the cure isn't likely to be as psychologically disturbing as whatever was bothering them in the first place.

And since Makavejev gives us only very brief glimpses of isolated aspects of Reichian therapy but does not provide us enough information to place these within the context of an overall program, whatever we do see is very likely to appear gratuitous and merely exotic. This is particularly true of the footage where we see a huge roomful of men and women lying in rows on the floor, stripped down to underwear or bathing suits, taking turns standing on each other's stomachs or jumping up and down on each other's buttocks. (Moreover, the poor lighting of this footage—producing a fuzzy image—combined with the prominence in the foreground of several very fat individuals in their underwear, unfortunately evokes a rather dingy, sleazy atmosphere that would not even be flattering to a reducing salon—which is what the scene resembles.)

All in all, then, Makavejev's presentation of Reich and Reichian therapy raises a great many questions in our minds, not just about Reich but also about Makavejev's attitude toward Reich. Obviously he is sympathetic to Reich, and the film is in some ways a tribute to Reich, but it is also clear, I think, that Makavejev's attitude toward Reich is by no means uncritical. And this is a very healthy sign. For one thing, it enables us to begin to appreciate the complexity of the relations between sex and politics which Reich was one of the first to examine.

To further complicate matters, Makavejev suddenly introduces in rapid succession two new blocs of material whose relation to Reichian therapy or to Reich's ideas in general is very ambiguous. The first, introduced in the guise of a "Sexpol film, Yugoslavia, 1971," is a humorous allegorical fiction about a cute Yugoslav girl (Milena Dravic) who, much to the chagrin of her jealous worker boy friend, advocates "free love." Significantly, this allegorical fiction (which will dominate the latter half of the film) begins with an argument between Milena and her boy friend, who yells angrily that she is betraying her working-class origins by hanging around with the "free love" crowd, whom he contemptuously accuses of

indulging in the same kind of consumer-product fetishism as the capitalists. In a pun on "Max Factor," he shouts that Yugoslavians are urged to buy "Marx Factor"—and at this instant Makavejev cuts to a shot of New York's 42nd St. and a heavily made-up drag queen sharing an ice cream-cone with his/her homosexual boy friend. Since this travelling shot, which follows the "couple" as they walk, is obviously not a part of the Yugoslav material, and since it brings us back to America, we associate it with the Reichian documentary material and suspect that it somehow refers to still another aspect of the Reichian movement in America—an association which is strengthened when Makavejev cuts from this shot to more documentary footage of Reichian therapy in action.

However, although certain associations with the Reichian movement are intentionally set up by it, this shot itself belongs to a third bloc of material that is neither documentary footage on Reich nor part of the allegorical fiction set in Yugoslavia, its function being to mediate between these other two types of material and to raise questions about both of them. Also included in this third bloc of intercut material are a brief visit to the office of *Screw* magazine (whose editorial staff walks around nude), an interview with a woman artist who specializes in painting portraits of people in the act of masturbating, and a long sequence which examines an enterprising young sculptress's process of making a plaster cast of an erect penis in order to turn out "individualized" penis-shaped sculptures for display on your own or your girlfriend's coffeetable. Aside from its shock value and its humorous quality, this material seems intended primarily to illustrate what Makavejev considers certain characteristically American *aberrations* of sexual identity. Makavejev has said, (*Positif*, July-August 1971), that the case of the drag queen—who later in the film recounts his first homosexual experience and reveals that, turned on to homosexuality, he went transvestite, only to be spurned by his original homosexual partner, who, "being used to boys, just couldn't make it with 'girls'"—seems to him perfectly sym-

bolic of contemporary America's deep confusion over sexual identity.

The intercut material also has the effect, however, of calling into question Reich's ideas—particularly the directions his later work in America was leading him. Although Makavejev is careful to respect the integrity of the documentary material on Reich and Reichian therapy, nonetheless, his montage construction of the film as a whole suggests certain associations and affinities between Reichian sexology and the attitudes towards sex of the individuals in the intercut material. And as bizarre as these attitudes may seem, there is, after all, almost a family resemblance between them and the Reichian pitch on the Orgone Accumulator Box. In fact, the penis-sculptures, the masturbation-portraits, and the Orgone Box might all be considered fertility or potency *fetishes*. (My own guess is that Reich intended the Orgone Box to function as just such a fetish and thereby to open up a *mythic* dimension that would hopefully enable people to relate more freely and fully to their own sexuality.)

The problem with fetishes, however, as Marx brilliantly observed, is that in capitalist society all consumer-products are fetishes (and today nearly all have sexual overtones, as scrutiny of any advertising pitch will reveal). For contemporary Americans, then, the mythic dimension is plugged directly into the consumer economy of advanced capitalism, which tries to sell us ever greater quantities of fetishes. Instead of liberating our natural sexuality, we get bogged down at the level of what Marcuse calls repressive desublimation, where, deluded by the new aura of permissiveness and hedonism cultivated by advertising, we throw ourselves—without any more guilt pangs, but *compulsively* nonetheless—into the consumption of sex, which becomes another commodity. The old Puritan morality which was necessary to a society dominated by scarcity has given way to a new, more permissive but equally repressive morality geared to serve the needs of the consumer society.

But Makavejev's use of the intercut material

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not only points out the fetishistic aspect of American society, it also comments on the fetishistic aspect of Russian communism, particularly under Stalin. There the mythic dimension is plugged directly into politically cultivated hero-worship. Stalin becomes a fetish. And a cut from a shot of Stalin (as played by the actor Guelovani) to a shot of the finished penis-sculpture, then back to Stalin, clearly suggests the affinities between these two fetishes—both of them representing, at the psychic level, sexual energy that has become rigid and lifeless while enshrined as an object of veneration.

But in order to understand clearly the rich implications of Makavejev's montage of the Stalin-footage, we need to establish, as closely as possible, the shot-by-shot progression of this important sequence. As Milena finishes her impromptu speech advocating free love, she joins arms with the Yugoslav workers whom she has been haranguing and leads them in a triumphal march around the inner balcony of the low-cost apartment house where they

all live (recalling, incidentally, the central courtyard which, more than just functioning as a décor, was almost the central protagonist in Renoir and Prévert's examination of a workers's community in *Le Crime de Monsieur Lange*). At this point, as they move from left to right across the screen, Makavejev cuts to a shot of Mao, also moving left to right across the screen as he walks along a reviewing stand waving triumphantly to a huge throng of admirers, who, red book in hand, jubilantly wave back. The last words of Milena, just before the cut, are that "Socialism without fucking is dull and lifeless." The first impression created by this statement and the sudden cut to Mao is that Mao's brand of socialism is not exempt from Milena's criticism. However, as the camera moves from Mao himself to the wildly cheering sea of humanity in the huge public square, we are reminded that, numerically at least, the world's most populous nation must necessarily do a healthy amount of fucking; and that in this literal sense, "lifeless" is hardly a word that applies to China.

To add to the ambiguity, however, Makavejev then cuts to a shot of Stalin, who is also parading triumphantly from left to right across the screen. Moreover, superimposed on the shot of Stalin (again, it is the actor Guelovani) are images of Nazi flags unfurled beneath Stalin's feet as he walks. Not having seen Tchiaorelli's *The Pledge* (1946), which is the film Makavejev has borrowed his Stalin footage from, I can't say whether the superimposed flags are part of the original or whether Makavejev has added them; but more likely they are in the original and were used to suggest that to Stalin goes the credit for trampling underfoot the infamous Nazi banner. Here, however, in the context of Makavejev's *WR*, the Nazi flags suggest a certain affinity between Stalin and Nazism and seem to indicate that the path down which Stalin was leading socialism was in reality the path of fascism.

This latter interpretation clearly becomes the dominant if not the exclusive one, when immediately following Stalin's ceremonious declaration that the Russian Revolution not only destroyed the old bourgeois order but also succeeded in building a new socialist order, Makavejev intercuts a gruesome shot of a hospital patient being force-fed by having a tube jammed up his nose while uniformed attendants hold him down (an image which recalls an almost identical shot in Frederick Wiseman's *Titicut Follies*). Then there is a cut back to Stalin, who declares that Russian Communism continues to advance on the path marked out by Lenin—"with the present leaders carrying out each directive he passed on to us." And at this instant, Makavejev cuts to another hospital patient (or perhaps the same one?) being given electric shock treatment which induces uncontrollable body spasms.

The implication is obvious here, and although one could argue that Makavejev intends the reference to Lenin ironically in order to point out how Stalin invoked Lenin's name to justify policies of ruthless self-aggrandizement, nonetheless, in light of the thinly veiled indictment of Lenin which later follows, this particular sequence must be seen as the

film's first attempt to trace the authoritarian and repressive trends in Soviet Communism to Lenin himself. Finally, the sequence closes with a return to Stalin, then a cut to the young American sculptress removing the finished penis-sculpture from the plaster cast and placing it for display on a table, followed by a cut back to Stalin again as he proudly announces that "the first stage of communism has been achieved"—at which point Makavejev intercuts one final shot of a mental patient repeatedly banging his head against the wall of his locked cell.

At the close of this important sequence, then, a certain "false climax" has been reached, and Makavejev has skillfully and humorously associated the betrayal of the genuinely liberating potential of the Russian Revolution with the channelling of sexual energy into rigid and lifeless fetishes. Now the scene returns to Yugoslavia and there ensues a gradual development of the fictional plot of Milena's love life.

The Russian Ice Follies come to Belgrade. Milena and her roommate attend a performance, where a pair of Yugoslav soldiers on leave try to pick them up. Milena, however, is fascinated by the handsome star of the ice show, the Russian figure-skating champion, named Vladimir Ilyich. She goes backstage to meet him, flirts with him, and invites him to accompany her back to her apartment. Once there, Milena and Vladimir carry on a conversation that is quite funny due to Vladimir's persistence in avoiding Milena's questions about his personal life—which he dismisses by saying that personal accomplishments don't matter much when, as in Russia, everyone is "happy to be a servant of the state." Moreover, Vladimir remains so caught up in his pronouncements of lofty idealism that he is completely oblivious to the antics of Milena's comely roommate, who has casually taken off all her clothes and nearly sat in his lap in an unsuccessful attempt to get his attention. Meanwhile, Milena's working-class boy friend—who has been locked out by Milena—uses his pickaxe to break through the wall from the

nextdoor apartment, barging in triumphantly and shouting that he will "protect Milena from bourgeois intellectuals," as he throws Vladimir Ilyich into a closet which he nails shut.

After some brief (rather gratuitous) intercut material depicting the antics of a street-theater "guerilla-fighter" who clowns around the financial district of New York City with a toy machine-gun, the film returns to Milena and Vladimir as they go for a walk in the snow—apparently the morning following the scene in Milena's apartment. Vladimir's incarceration in the closet seems to have been in fun and presumably brief, for he laughs over the incident and speaks admiringly of Milena's boy friend's having broken right through a wall to protect her. He also speaks of having enjoyed listening to music the night before—particularly, he says, the *Appassionata* Sonata by Beethoven. "The trouble is," he adds, "I can't listen to music too often. It's bad for my nerves; it makes me want to say stupid, nice things and stroke people gently on the head; but you stroke people on the head today and you might get your hand bitten off. What we need to do today . . ." he adds with sudden anger, "is hit people over the head, without mercy . . . although in principle of course we are opposed to all violence."

These words—which Makavejev puts in the mouth of his Russian figure-skating champion—are, of course, the actual words of none other than "Vladimir Ilyich" Lenin himself, as recounted by Maxim Gorky in his *Days with Lenin*. Makavejev has simply tacked on to the end of Lenin's remark the qualification that "in principle we are opposed to all violence." (Makavejev has also framed the shot after a famous photograph of Lenin vigorously driving a point home to the masses.)

As Vladimir says this, Milena reaches out to gently calm him, but he turns suddenly and slaps her brutally in the face, knocking her down in the snow. Shaken, she looks up at him, and here Makavejev cuts to a shot of Stalin standing in the snow presiding over a public rally while a huge banner is unfurled behind him bearing the image of Lenin. Stalin

declares proudly that Russian communism need fear no would-be enemies, for the life and work of Lenin are "an arrow thrust boldly and with true aim toward the enemy camp."

Stalin's metaphor is then taken up by Milena, as Makavejev cuts back to her. Sobbingly, she throws herself at Vladimir, pounding him on the chest repeatedly with her fists, slapping his face, and telling him what a phony he is—"a petty human lie dressed up as a great historical truth." "You profess to love all humanity, but you are incapable of loving one human individual. Have you ever loved anyone as a man should? Have you ever been able to fulfill a woman, thrusting your arrow boldly and with true aim?" Finally, overcome at last by Milena's emotional goading, Vladimir passionately draws her to him and kisses her on the lips, eyes, face, then full-mouthed as Milena acquiesces in spite of her anger.

What happens next in the drama of Milena and Vladimir, however, is only pieced together in retrospect by what transpires in the next sequence—following more brief intercut material—in which two police inspectors discuss clues relating to a savage murder of a young woman whose body and severed head were found along a riverbank. The severed head is brought to a police laboratory and placed on an examining table. We recognize it immediately, of course, as Milena's. One officer remarks that the presumed murder weapon was found nearby—pulling out of a sack an ice-skate which he admiringly identifies as of professional championship quality. The other officer remarks in passing that an autopsy revealed that the victim's vagina contained 4 to 5 times the normal amount of sperm. Since there didn't seem to be any marks on her body, however, or signs of a scuffle at the scene of the crime, he concludes that it is unlikely that she was the victim of a gang-bang or repeated rape. "It seems," he adds, "that she had sex willingly, perhaps at some orgy." Nonetheless, he decides it wise to check with local insane asylums to see if any sex-starved maniacs have escaped.

This attention to seemingly incidental detail

is characteristic of Makavejev's method—and this sequence recalls the very similar autopsy sequence in *Love Affair*. And, as usual, the detail is by no means incidental. The police, of course, are trying to gather information that will help them solve the crime—and the evidence leads them to consider the possibility of a sex crime. Moreover, Makavejev subtly evokes the connection between an individual's repressed or distorted sexuality and society's repressive structures by having the police officer suggest that they call the local insane asylums to see if any sex-starved maniacs have escaped; and this reference to insane asylums ties in nicely with the earlier shots of mental patients intercut with footage of Stalin—thus reinforcing the earlier suggestion that under Stalinist domination all of the Soviet bloc is turned into an enormous network of insane asylums.

Dramatically dominating this entire discussion by the two police inspectors, however, is our own awareness that we know something they don't know: namely that the skate presumed to be the murder weapon very likely belongs to Vladimir Ilyich, and that when Milena was last seen (by us, of course) she was locked in a volatile embrace with Vladimir at the very spot where, later, her dead body was discovered. Consequently, where the vicious decapitation and the sperm in Milena's vagina are concerned, we have reason to believe that that was no sex-starved maniac who put it to her, that was Lenin!

Ah, but there's the rub. With this seemingly incidental set of details, Makavejev has suggested a possible affinity between Lenin and a sex-starved maniac. And Lenin's readiness to resort to violence (even though against it in principle) is here associated by Makavejev with a sex crime in the sense that the violent behavior arises out of the individual's insecurity and tension in relating to his own repressed sexuality. (In conversation, Makavejev voiced the opinion that in fact Lenin's relations with women were not well resolved and were a source of serious tensions in his life.) The fictional plot concerning Milena's love life has thus

enabled Makavejev to examine and dramatize Wilhelm Reich's insight and to apply these Reichian notions to a friendly but critical re-evaluation of Lenin's role in shaping the Communist movement.

The verdict on Lenin is harsh—and it is pronounced by Milena herself, as her severed head suddenly comes to life and she declares that "Vladimir Ilyich was a genuine red fascist"—adding, however, that "even now I am not ashamed or regretful of my communist past." The film does not close here, however, as Makavejev cuts from the severed head of Milena to a long, poignant panning shot of the Russian figure-skating champion, Vladimir Ilyich, walking aimlessly in the snow while on the sound track we hear Bulat Okoudjava's plaintive Russian song dedicated to François Villon. Phrased in the form of a prayer addressed to a god who doesn't exist (a touch Makavejev particularly liked), the song is a



plea to "grant to each person some little thing, but remember I'm here too"—words which touchingly evoke the communist commitment to a just distribution among all citizens, but which also touchingly evoke the personal plight of the individual, who, no matter how great his ideals may be, remains as frail and emotionally vulnerable to life's troubles as the rest of us . . . even if his name happens to be Vladimir Ilyich.

Ending on this poignant note, WR, like all of Makavejev's films, leaves us with an acute

sense of sympathy for the solitary individual whose private, personal turmoil and struggle are dialectically set against the public aspirations to grand humanitarian ideals. But precisely because Makavejev's method is so profoundly dialectical, we sense that the contradiction between the individual and the social aspirations need not necessarily be an antagonistic one: the plea in Okoudjava's song is a plea for the individual, but for the individual who himself subscribes to the communist commitment to create a society which provides to each according to his need.

The film, then, while critical of the authoritarian and repressive elements within the com-

munist movement—some of which are traced to Lenin himself—seems clearly to be an honest and sincere attempt to bring out the revolutionary potential for genuine liberation which has so often been betrayed and distorted by our neglect of the all-important psychosexual foundations of political behavior. And the tribute which is offered to Wilhelm Reich by WR: *The Mysteries of the Organism* is all the more meaningful because Makavejev no more adopts an uncritical attitude toward Reich than he does toward Lenin, but instead chooses to respect the complexity of our human predicament—caught up as we are, and as they were, in a sound and fury of sex and politics.

MICHAEL DEMPSEY

The World of Ken Russell

Given the limited standards of restraint, good taste, and humanism on which most of our film critics generally base their opinions, any films they viciously attack on these grounds stand a pretty good chance of being innovative, adventurous works. *The Music Lovers* and *The Devils*, both directed by Ken Russell, have received incredibly poisonous reviews from most of these critics, but their wrath cannot hide their naiveté. Most of this abuse was mere finger-pointing—at Glenda Jackson rolling around naked on the floor of a train, Richard Chamberlain pounding the piano and staring soulfully off into space, the King of France in drag, the crazy nuns, the disease and torture and madness, the pyrotechnical camerawork. These are just the things for snap-judging reviewers to belabor with words like scabrous, hysterical, garish, or vulgar. It is certainly a lot easier than giving these maddening, contrary, breathtaking films a close look. Such a look is overdue. Russell's films are as personal

as any auteurist could desire. More important, despite their varied subjects—Tchaikovsky, the Loudun witchcraft case of 1634—their themes, characters, and stylistic devices possess a thorough artistic unity.

Begin with style. Russell favors theatrically extravagant images, sounds, and performances. Sometimes these three elements comment on each other, working deliberately at cross-purposes; sometimes they blend to intensify each other; either way he pushes them to extremes. His opulent imagery seeks to draw us into worlds that promise splendor and excitement, even if terror and suffering also threaten. The dialogue in *The Devils*—lines lifted from John Whiting's play, adapted from Aldous Huxley's prose, or written by Russell himself—is theatrically self-conscious, aphoristic, rhetorical. So are the letters of Tchaikovsky and Mme. von Meck in *The Music Lovers* and D. H. Lawrence's own speech in *Women in Love*. *The Music Lovers* also uses Tchaikovsky's music with